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SMOKING-RELATED CANCERS DECLINE SIGNIFICANTLY IN CALIFORNIA WHILE OTHER REGIONS SEE LITTLE CHANGE

SACRAMENTO - Lung and bronchus cancer incidence rates are declining faster in California than in other regions of the nation, mostly because fewer Californians are smoking, according to a new study published today by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The study, which appears in the latest issue of *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, shows that lung and bronchus cancer rates in California decreased 14 percent between 1988 and 1997, while rates remained relatively stable in eight other regions of the country, declining a combined rate of 2.7 percent.

California's lung and bronchus cancer rates decreased from 71.9 cases for every 100,000 residents in 1988 to 60.1 in 1997. During the same period, rates for other regions combined declined from 67.7 to 64.7. According to the CDC, cigarette smoking is responsible for 87 percent of all lung cancers.

In addition, recent statistics from the California Department of Health Services (DHS) show an accelerating rate of decline in lung cancer incidences. From 1997 to 1998, the incidence of lung cancer declined from 60.1 to 57.6 cases for every 100,000 residents.

"There is no mystery as to why California has witnessed a significant decline in the incidence of lung and bronchus cancers, while other regions nationwide have seen little or no change," said State Health Director Diana M. Bontá, R.N., "Californians smoke, and those who still smoke are smoking less. This impressive achievement is due to the combination of healthier lifestyles and California's comprehensive tobacco education campaign."

As a result of the decrease in smoking, an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 fewer lung cancer cases and more than 2,000 fewer deaths will occur this year in California than if the incidence of cancer would have remained the same since as in 1988. Nonetheless, in 2000, an estimated 18,000 Californians will be diagnosed with lung cancer and about 14,000 will die from the disease. Even with California's progress, more people will die from lung cancer than from any other type of cancer.

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Among women in California, lung and bronchus cancer rates decreased 4.8 percent, while rates for women in other regions increased 13.2 percent. Among men in California, rates declined 21.3 percent, while the rates decreased only 13.1 percent in other regions over the same period.

The CDC study attributed the declines in California in large part to the reduction in smoking and per capita consumption that were seen from the late 1970s to early 1990s. However, according to Bontá, the reported decrease is a clear indicator of even greater declines in lung and bronchus cancer that should occur in the near future as a result of even larger reductions in tobacco use that have occurred in California over the last decade.

“Californians have only begun to see the tremendous health benefits from more than a decade of comprehensive tobacco education programs which have helped to change how they view tobacco use,” said Bontá. “We must continue these programs in full force to effectively counter the tobacco industry’s aggressive marketing of tobacco in California, and help those who use tobacco products to break the chains of their addiction. The tobacco industry continues to market, sell and addict consumers with a product that kills. Far too many Californians still suffer the severe physical, emotional and financial consequences caused by tobacco use.”

In November 1988, the Tobacco Tax and Health Protection Act of 1988 (Proposition 99), was established by California voters. Twenty percent of the tax revenue was slated to fund the California Tobacco Control Program – the world’s first comprehensive tobacco control program. Since the passage of Proposition 99, adult smoking prevalence in California has declined by 21 percent. Per capita cigarette consumption also has plummeted by more than 52 percent. In 1999, cigarette consumption in California was 61.3 packs per capita, compared to 106.8 packs per capita nationwide.

The CDC study compared lung and bronchus cancer incidence data between the National Cancer Institute’s Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER) program and the California Cancer Registry. The SEER data included five states – Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, New Mexico and Utah and three standard metropolitan areas – Atlanta, Detroit and Seattle-Puget Sound.